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Keep BART-to-SFO on Track

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A SMALL group of Peninsula activists continues to try to stymie BART's plans to run train service to San Francisco International Airport.

Its latest argument is that the \$1 billion project, now under construction, should be scaled back because it is running over budget and federal funding is coming in slower than expected. Specifically, the Coalition for a One-Stop Terminal (COST) has suggested that BART should scrap the portion that would extend service south of the airport, to a Millbrae station.

Given the importance of this project, we recently invited representatives of BART and COST in for an Editorial Board meeting to debate the issues.

While it was clear that BART does have some serious budget problems with the project, it was equally apparent that elimination of the Millbrae station would not make any sense from either an economic or transportation-planning standpoint.

For starters, scaling back the project would be inviting Congress to reduce the funding even further. And a perception of controversy on this project would make it easier for lawmakers to justify shifting the money to projects in other regions.

Also, the airlines have agreed to put \$113 million into the project. A major revision of the plans, such as eliminating the Millbrae extension, would require renegotiation of that hard-won pact -- with the possibility of a smaller airline contribution.

Moreover, the purpose of this project is to get air travelers to take mass transit to SFO. It would seem imperative to have at least one stop south of the airport. Also, the Millbrae station would have a convenient cross-platform connection with Caltrain.

The debate about the best way to bring BART to the airport has been settled. It is time to stop the obstructionist tactics and make a strong, unified regional pitch for full congressional funding.

The region's leaders should be striving to keep this project on budget and on schedule for its December 2001 completion.

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